

RAYMOND HOOD

City of Towers

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

January 7 - March 7, 1994



Raymond Hood: City of Towers

In the 1920s, an explosive decade of city growth, Raymond M. Hood was America's most celebrated skyscraper architect. His colleagues and critics were stunned by his errant eclecticism and calculated recalcitrance; he was described as a "brilliant bad boy"¹ and a "flame of vigor, imagination, daring."² Summarizing Hood's career, his contemporary Thomas Tallmadge wrote: "Perhaps it was Hood's personality, reflected so acutely by this period of architecture, that makes him the symbol of an era, unexampled alike for its brevity and brilliance."³ But while Hood typified the new twenties architect, he was also highly individual in his design approach.

In 1922, at age forty-one, Hood rose from obscurity to national notoriety with his winning design for the Chicago Tribune Tower, a competition he entered in association with an older, established architect, John Mead Howells. This international competition for the newspaper's new skyscraper headquarters was the most publicized architectural event of the decade, and Hood's victory ensured his future as an architect.

During the next twelve years, until his early death in 1934, Hood designed four other skyscrapers, all for companies located in midtown Manhattan: American Radiator, Daily News, McGraw-Hill, and RCA. While the Tribune Tower had been conservatively clothed in delicate neo-Gothic ornament, the exteriors of these subsequent buildings broke sharply with convention and each in turn became the most discussed structure in the country. Hood introduced a new freedom in the use of color and enlarged the scale of exterior pattern. The black brick facing with contrasting gold details of the American Radiator Building was an unprecedented decorative treatment, as was the bold vertical striping of the Daily News Building and the blue-green tile "skin" of the McGraw-Hill Building. Although the RCA Building was clad in traditional limestone (a committee decision of the Associated Architects of Rockefeller Center), Hood proposed nearly seven acres of roof gardens to enliven the scene.

Beneath the variety of facade treatments, however, Hood maintained a consistent attitude toward form which distinguished his work from that of his contemporaries. Advocating the tower as the ideal form for the skyscraper, he rejected the emphatic expression of the setback structure favored by such prominent designers and

close friends as Ely Jacques Kahn and Ralph Walker. Despite the 1916 New York City zoning law that made setbacks almost unavoidable, Hood turned each of his buildings into a freestanding tower. The Art Deco approach then in fashion treated the skyscraper as a series of stacked boxes with horizontal bands of ornament accenting the setbacks. Hood, in contrast, emphasized the uninterrupted verticality of the structure and its coherence as a single mass either through uniform color or strong pattern.

Like many of his American and European contemporaries, Hood was fascinated by the concept of an architect-designed urban future, and he believed that the skyscraper should be the defining structure. Beginning in 1924, he published a series of visionary proposals for a rationalized city of towers in which he argued that widely spaced towers afforded both the advantages of dense concentration and efficient traffic circulation.

Hood exemplified the new breed of businessman-architect that began to dominate the profession in the years after World War I. He sought and served corporate clients, monumentalizing their success. Hood's buildings represented advertising, not ideology, and although he was in the forward line of those searching for a "modern" style, he was not avant-garde. As an interviewer observed in 1931: "Traditions mean nothing to him except hurdles which must be jumped in order to keep pace with modern life.... He has reared no temples to dead gods; he has built workshops for living men and in their construction he has proclaimed the era of business, of machinery and speed."⁴

CAROL WILLIS
Guest Curator

1. Allene Talmey, "Man Against the Sky," *The New Yorker*, April 11, 1931, p. 24.

2. Thomas Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1936), p. 299.

3. Ibid.

4. S. J. Woolf, "An Architect Hails the Rule of Reason," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 1, 1931, p. 6.

Checklist

All drawings are by Raymond M. Hood (1881–1934) unless otherwise indicated. Dimensions are given first in inches, then in centimeters; height precedes width. The numbers for the sketches of the Chicago Tribune Tower refer to those marked by Hood on the drawings, probably at some later date, to indicate the sequence of the drawings still in his possession.

The first ten drawings are from the Raymond Hood Papers in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Raymond Hood, proposal for “Manhattan 1950,” aerial view over the commercial center, December 26, 1929

Sketch for Chicago Tribune Tower, no. 2,
August 1, 1922
Charcoal on board, 26 x 14 (66 x 35.6)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Sketch for Chicago Tribune Tower,
no. 3, 1922
Charcoal on board, 26½ x 14 (67.3 x 35.6)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Sketch for Chicago Tribune Tower,
no. 4, 1922
Charcoal, pencil, ink, and white chalk on
board, 24¼ x 13¼ (61.6 x 33.7)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Sketch for Chicago Tribune Tower,
no. 11, 1922
Pencil with sepia on board, 29 x 20
(73.7 x 50.8)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Sketch for Chicago Tribune Tower,
no. 13, 1922
Charcoal, pencil, and ink wash on board,
29 x 16 (73.7 x 40.6)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Sketches for Chicago Tribune Tower,
details of top and base, 1922
Pencil on paper, 20 x 18½ (50.8 x 47)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Sketches for Chicago Tribune Tower,
three versions of base, 1922
Pencil on paper, 29 x 20¼ (73.7 x 51.4)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Project for a pair of Chicago Tribune
Towers, December 13, 1922
Watercolor and charcoal on board,
20 x 13 (50.8 x 33)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Project for an addition to Chicago Tribune
Tower, December 19, 1922
Charcoal on board, 24½ x 14½ (62.2 x 36.8)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Proposal for a tower for General Electric (?),
February 14, 1924
Charcoal on board, 24½ x 14½ (62.2 x 36.8)
Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Proposal for a City of Towers, c. 1927
Photographic enlargement from original
ink and gouache drawing, 17 x 9½
(43.2 x 24.1)
The Architectural Archives, University of
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Proposal for a City of Towers, c. 1927
Photographic enlargement from original
ink and gouache drawing, 17 x 11½
(43.2 x 29.2)
The Architectural Archives, University of
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Proposal for “Manhattan 1950,” skyscraper
bridges, December 26, 1929
Charcoal, ink, and watercolor on paper,
17 x 19⅞ (43.2 x 48.6)
Collection of Trientje Hood Reed

Proposal for “Manhattan 1950,” aerial view
over the commercial center, December
26, 1929
Signed by Raymond Hood, rendering by
“C.L.” (Carl Landefeld?)
Ink wash on board, 18⅝ x 18⅝ (47.3 x 47.3)
Collection of Trientje Hood Reed

Office of John Mead Howells and
Raymond M. Hood
Office drawing no. 38 for the Daily News
Building, north and west elevations,
March 1, 1929
Black ink with pencil on linen,
38¾ x 50 (98.4 x 127)
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library,
Columbia University, New York

Office of John Mead Howells and
Raymond M. Hood
Office drawing no. 40 for the Daily News
Building, cross section, stair, and details,
March 1, 1929
Black ink and pencil on linen, 38½ x 50
(98.1 x 127)
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library,
Columbia University, New York

Office of John Mead Howells and
Raymond M. Hood
Full-scale elevation of bronze lanterns for
the Daily News Building, April 27, 1929
Charcoal, pencil, and blue and orange pencil
on tracing paper, 79 x 41¾ (200.7 x 106)
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library,
Columbia University, New York

Office of Raymond Hood, Godley, Fouilhoux
Office drawing no. 39 for the McGraw-Hill
Building, longitudinal section, looking
east, November 3, 1930
Black ink and pencil on linen,
40½ x 31½ (102.9 x 80.3)
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library,
Columbia University, New York

Office of Raymond Hood, Godley, Fouilhoux
McGraw-Hill Building, north and west
elevations, November 5, 1930
Pencil on tracing paper, 39½ x 32
(100.6 x 81.3)
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library,
Columbia University, New York

Hugh Ferriss (1889–1962)
American Radiator Building, c. 1924
Lithograph, 19 x 9½ (48.3 x 24.1)
Collection of Trientje Hood Reed

John Wenrich (1894–1970)
Rockefeller Center, general air view detail,
seen from above 47th St., looking
northeast, February 1931
Pencil, pastel, and gouache on paper,
22 x 18 (55.9 x 45.7)
Rockefeller Center, New York

John Wenrich
Rockefeller Center, RCA Building, 1931
Pencil, pastel, and gouache on paper,
26¼ x 13¼ (66.7 x 33.7)
Rockefeller Center, New York

John Wenrich
General view of Rockefeller Center from
northeast, seen from above St. Patrick's
Cathedral, 1931
Pencil, pastel, and gouache on paper,
31¼ x 19½ (79.4 x 49.5)
Rockefeller Center, New York

Office of the Associated Architects of
Rockefeller Center
Air view of landscaped roofs (unknown
renderer), c. 1931
Ink with watercolor wash on paper,
37 x 28 (94 x 71.1)
Rockefeller Center, New York

In 1981, the Institute for Architecture and
Urban Studies (IAUS) undertook to organ-
ize a major retrospective and to publish a
catalogue on the architecture of Raymond
Hood. For their generous support of this
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The exhibition was designed by Lynn Breslin.
C.W.

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Free lunch-time lectures

City of Towers

Carol Willis, architectural historian and guest curator
January 11, 1984 - 12:30 pm

Saturday Walking Tours: Hood Skyscrapers

Anthony Robins, preservation specialist, New York City
Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 21, 1984 - 1:00 pm
January 28, 1984 - 1:00 pm
(Weather permitting)

Hood and Rockefeller Center

Carol Krinsky, architectural historian and professor,
New York University
February 1, 1984 - 12:30 pm

Raymond Hood: Pragmatism and Poetics in the Waning Metropolitan Era

Robert A.M. Stern, architect and professor, Columbia
University School of Architecture
February 7, 1984 - 12:30 pm

Admission is by reservation only.
(212) 878-2453.

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Whitney Museum of American Art
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120 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Gallery Hours

Monday - Saturday 11:00 - 6:00
Thursday 11:00 - 7:30
Free Admission

Gallery Talks

Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 12:30
Tours by appointment
For information call (212) 878-2550

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